

Prasa to get a new permanent board 'soon'

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A permanent board will soon be installed at the Passenger Rail Agency SA (Prasa), Deputy Minister of Transport Sindisiwe Chikunga says.



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"We are in the process of appointing a permanent board," Chikunga told Parliament's portfolio committee on transport when Prasa's interim board appeared before the committee together with civil society grouping UniteBehind.

Advertisements for the board positions would be placed within a week, Chikunga said.

UniteBehind was critical of the state of corporate governance at the transport utility, saying the lack of a permanent board was hampering investigations into state capture at Prasa.

UniteBehind is heading to the High Court in Cape Town to compel Minister of Transport Joe Maswanganyi to appoint a permanent board, as well as to prevent the potential muzzling of investigations into alleged state capture at Prasa.

Another pressure group, Rail Commuter Action Group, is also heading to court to have Prasa found in contempt of a court

ruling which stated that the agency was wholly responsible for safety and security at its railway stations. Numerous criminal incidents have continued to occur at stations.

"I would not be comfortable to discuss governance issues in the context of UniteBehind wanting to raise those matters before the committee," said Prasa interim board chair Tintswalo Makhubele. "When I looked at the invitation, I then became comfortable because this meeting is about operational matters and not governance matters," Makhubele said.

Committee acting chairman Leonard Ramatlakane suggested that while the state capture allegations at Prasa were pressing, it would best suit the meeting if the discussion was confined to operations. "There are issues in the UniteBehind presentation which relate to the broader discussion of state capture that is taking place and there is going to need to be a discussion on the contents of such a submission as to whether they would be referred to a special inquiry and a host of other issues," said Ramatlakane.

Zackie Achmat of UniteBehind said the civil society organisation was looking to have a full-time board appointed to Prasa with urgency.

The portfolio committee on transport needed to understand what took place at Prasa regarding state capture if it had any hope of guiding the entity in future, Achmat said.

"We sought relief in the Western Cape High Court because we were informed that the chair of that board decided to suspend Prasa lawyers and their legal panel and that would have shut down all of the investigations into state capture. We went to court to stop them from doing that," he said.

Interim group CEO Cromet Molepo told the committee that nearly 20% of Prasa's trains were out of service because of vandalism and maintenance.

Source: Business Day

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